

defiance of the bull of John XXII, to maintain St. Francis' rule as to evangelical poverty, suggests that doctrines impugning the sanctity of wealth resembled too closely the teaching of Christ to be acceptable to the princes of the Christian Church.

The basis of the "whole mediaeval economic system, under which, except in Italy and Flanders, more than nine-tenths of the population consisted of agriculturalists, had been serfdom or villeinage. Confronted in the sixteenth century with the unfamiliar evils of competitive agriculture, conservative reformers were to sigh for the social harmonies of a vanished age, which¹¹ knyt suche a knott of colaterall amytye betwene the Lordes and the tenaunts that the Lorde tendered his tenaunt as his childe, and the tenaunts againe loved and obeyed the Lorde as naturellye as the childe the father/'^{10S} Their idealization of the past is as misleading, as an account of the conditions of previous centuries, as it is illuminating as a comment upon those of their own. In reality, so far as the servile tenants, who formed the bulk of mediaeval agriculturalists, were concerned, the golden age of peasant prosperity is, except here and there, a romantic myth, at which no one would have been more surprised than the peasants themselves. The very essence of feudal property was exploitation in its most naked

and shame-
less form, compulsory labour, additional
coruees at the
very moments when the peasant's labour
was most
urgently needed on his own holding,
innumerable dues
and payments, the obligation to grind at
the lord's
mill and bake at the lord's oven, the private
justice of
the lord's court. The custom of the manor,
the scarcity
of labour, "and, in England; the steadily
advancing
encroachments of the royal courts,
blunted the edge
of the system, and in fifteenth-century
England a
prosperous yeomanry was rising on its
ruins. But,.
during, the greater part of the Middle Ages,
its cumulative
weight hg,d been, nevertheless, immense.
Those who